ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Case File No.: AA-009596
AK-040-03-EA-033

Applicant: Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Division of Sport Fish
333 Raspberry Road
Anchorage, Alaska 99518-1599

Type of Action: Recreation and Public Purposes Act Lease, 43 CFR 2912

Location: NE¼SW¼, Section 9, T. 13 N., R. 3 W., Seward Meridian.

Prepared By: Rodney Huffman, Realty Specialist

Preparing Office: Bureau of Land Management
Anchorage Field Office
6881 Abbott Loop Road
Anchorage, Alaska 99507

Date: September 17, 2003

I. INTRODUCTION:

A. Background:

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), Division of Sport Fish, operates the Elmendorf Fish Hatchery (Hatchery) on land leased under the Recreation and Public Purposes Act (R&PPA). ADF&G operates two hatcheries in this area, the Elmendorf Hatchery and the Fort Richardson Fish Hatchery. Due to a decrease in fish production at the Fort Richardson, some of its fish production has been shifted to the Elmendorf Hatchery. The result is that the Elmendorf Hatchery needs to increase its fish production to meet the increased demand.

B. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action:

This increasing demand for additional fish production at the Hatchery has created a need for more on-site feed storage. Additionally, the Hatchery has identified a need to secure more water to facilitate the increase in fish production. Included as part of this proposal is an analysis of building a small Generator Shed to house a diesel generator used as the back-up power source.

C. Conformance with Land Use Plan:

The Proposed Action has been reviewed and found to be in compliance with the Southcentral Management Framework Plan (MFP), March 1980. Objective Number L-1 of the MFP states the BLM intends to "Satisfy state and local government needs as well as public and/or private demonstrated needs for land as they arise."

II. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVE

D. Proposed Action:

ADF&G is proposing to construct two small structures and an additional well and the associated pipeline within the boundary of the Elmendorf Fish Hatchery Lease Area.

The first building to be constructed will be a Fish-Feed Storage Building. The building footprint is approximately 13 feet wide, 60 feet long and 12 feet high. The foundation will be a concrete on-grade slab. This building will be located immediately adjacent to an existing Freezer Structure. A conduit for the electrical wiring will be run underground from the Freezer Structure to this new building. No need for plumbing is foreseen; therefore no trenching beyond what has been discussed is planned. The area where the building will be built has been cleared previously and is located directly between two roads. See the attached Hatchery Site Plan.

The second building will be a Generator Shed. The building footprint is approximately 12 feet wide, 12 feet long and 10 feet high. The foundation will be a concrete on-grade slab. This building will be located immediately adjacent to the existing Aeration Structure. An electrical conduit will be run to the adjacent exterior wall of the Aeration Structure, where an electrical box is already located. The diesel generator will produce 20 KV of electricity and will be a back-up for use during power outages. Diesel fuel will be stored in a fifteen gallon metal fuel tank with plastic containment equal to 110% of fuel capacity located underneath.

The proposed well will be the third well (Well #4) located within the lease boundary. The diameter of the well casing will be 8 inches with the anticipation that the well will produce between 300-500 gallons of water per minute. The depth of the well will be at least 100 feet to a maximum of 200 feet, depending on the depth of the aquifer encountered. The drill site will be west of an existing driveway into the hatchery, approximately five feet off the road. The area is graveled presently and soil extracted during the drilling process will be spread around the area to a maximum depth of 2 inches. During the initial capacity testing, water will be discharged into an existing brood pond. If sufficient water is located and development of the well system is determined to be practicable, ADF&G will apply for a water right from the State of Alaska and they will connect the well to the existing water system feeding the hatchery.

Connecting the well to the existing water system will require digging a 400 foot long ditch to accommodate a pipeline. The ditch will start at the Aeration Filtration and Lift Station and run northeast behind the Boneyard Storage and then to the well location. This route will be partially under an existing hatchery road and partially in a fill area now covered by grass. The trench will be approximately 3½ feet deep with the excavated soil piled next to the trench. Trenching will be accomplished with a small rubber tired backhoe, and refilled at the end of the work. The pipeline will consist of 6 inch HDPE pipe buried approximately 3½ feet deep. A conduit for electrical wiring will be laid in the same trench. The electrical tie in will be with an existing electrical box located at the Aeration Filtration and Lift Station. See the attached Hatchery Site Plan.

E. No Action Alternative:

The No Action Alternative would be to deny this request. Under this alternative ADF&G would have to find other ways to store the additional feed or continue hatchery operations at the current level.

III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

A. Critical Elements:

The following critical elements of the human environment have been analyzed and are either not present or will not be affected by the Proposed Action or the No Action Alternative.

Air Quality
Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
Cultural Resources/Paleontology
Environmental Justice
Farmlands (Prime or Unique)
Floodplains
Native American Religious Concerns
Subsistence
Threatened and Endangered Species
Wastes (Hazardous/Solid)
Water Quality (Surface/Ground)
Wetlands/Riparian Zones
Wild and Scenic Rivers
Wilderness

1. ANILCA Section 810 Clearance:
   The Proposed Action and Alternative have been analyzed and determined to have no effect on any subsistence uses or needs under Section 810.

2. Cultural Resources:
   No cultural resources are known for the Area of Potential Effect. Given the previous disturbance in the area of the project, previously unknown cultural resources are unlikely to occur in the project area.

3. Threatened and Endangered (T&E) Species Clearance:
   The Proposed Action and Alternative were evaluated in accordance with the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended. The Proposed Action and Alternative were determined to have no effect on threatened and endangered plants and animals and their habitats. No consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USF&WS) is necessary pursuant to Section 7 of the Act.

B. Land Status:

By Executive Order 8102, this land is under a withdrawal for a military reservation. BLM's role is to manage the vegetative and mineral resources. BLM issues land authorizations for this withdrawal, subject to the concurrence of the military. The U.S. Air Force will issue a letter of non-objection prior to authorization being given to construct any improvements.

C. Vegetation:

The project area is within the Cook Inlet/Susitna Lowlands major land resource area. Vegetation in and around the project area has been cleared for hatchery operations in the past. Climax vegetation would consist of paper birch, white spruce and cottonwoods, interspersed with thick patches of alder and willow brush.

D. Visual Resources:

This area is managed under a Class III Objective. The objective of this class is to partially retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be moderate. Management activities may attract attention but should not dominate the view of the casual observer.

E. Recreation:

The area for this project has limited recreation value as the land is reserved for military purposes and access is restricted by the military. The area described in the Proposed Action is within the Elmendorf Fish Hatchery Lease Area and not utilized by the general public for recreation. This area will not be opened to the general public in the foreseeable future.

F. Wildlife:

The site of the Proposed Action is an already disturbed and cleared area. The surrounding area supports a variety of animal species. Resident populations include moose, porcupine, snowshoe hare, microtine rodents and at least 40 species of resident and migrant land birds. Non-resident species that have been seen include fox, coyote, wolf, lynx, brown bear and black bear. Many migrant birds pass through the area during spring and fall migration, including several raptor and many neo-tropical species. Shrub and forest habitats provide nesting habitat for land birds and raptors, particularly Bald Eagles. There is one species of amphibian, the wood frog, that occurs in the area.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Impacts of the Proposed Action:

1. Critical Element - Invasive, Non-Native Species:

Areas that are trenched and refilled can be invaded by invasive, non-native species. The likelihood depends on whether there are seed sources in nearby areas or if seeds are transported in on construction equipment. The quicker disturbed sites re-vegetate, the less chance of invasive, non-native species becoming established. Disposal of cuttings around the well head has the potential to provide a site where non-native species would become established.

2. Vegetation:

The vegetation has already been manipulated in the project area. Some of the area has been cleared entirely and there will be no subsequent impact

to vegetation. The placement of the pipeline and well head in a grass area will not result in a deleterious effect to the vegetation in the overall area. Disturbed soil could re-colonize the first few years in weeds.

3. Visual Resources:
There will be limited visual impact in the form of the 8 inch well casing and the scar of the 400 foot trenched and filled pipeline path. Seeding and natural re-vegetation of the trench corridor will eventually obscure the pipeline path from casual view. The addition of two structures will have some visual impact, but are in keeping with the overall function and look of the current hatchery site.

4. Wildlife:
The project area is an already disturbed area and would not be heavily used by wildlife. Construction noise and activity may temporarily displace wildlife in the surrounding area. This will be short term and of limited impact.

5. Soils:
No adverse consequences are anticipated other than minimal disturbance associated with drilling and building construction.

B. Impacts of the No Action Alternative:
Under the No Action Alternative there will be no impacts because the project will not take place.

C. Cumulative Impacts:
The Proposed Action will allow the hatchery to increase fish production to meet current needs of the ADF&G. The location of the improvements is in an area that was cleared or filled in the past when the hatchery was originally constructed. Therefore, no further impacts are associated with this Proposed Action.

D. Residual Impacts:
There will be no residual impacts beyond what has already occurred due to past clearing.

E. Mitigation Measures:
To minimize introduction of invasive non-native plant species, equipment, and other materials brought on-site should be free of weed sources. Disturbed sites should be monitored to determine if non-native species become established. If these species are found, they should be removed. Excess soils from trenching and drilling should be raked smooth and seeded in areas that are not intended to remain cleared of vegetation.

V. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION:

A. Individuals and Agencies Consulted

Darrell Keifer, ADF&G, Sport Fish

B. List of Preparers:

Debbie Blank, Botanist
Jeff Denton, Wildlife Biologist
Rodney Huffman, Realty Specialist - Lead Preparer
Dave Kelley, Natural Resources Specialist
Donna Redding, Archaeologist
Mike Scott, Fisheries Biologist
Bruce Seppi, Wildlife Biologist